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RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5048
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7311
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1716
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000100

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2016
TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: INTERNATIONAL NGOS FACE CLIMATE OF INTIMIDATION

REF: A. COLOMBO 0038

1B. 06 COLOMBO 1892
1C. 06 COLOMBO 1626

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Elements of the government appear to be orchestrating a campaign against international NGOs, particularly those working in LTTE-controlled areas. On January 11, a mob led by the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party stormed the Colombo office of the Dutch NGO ZOA Refugee Care after government papers accused the organization of funding the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). On the same day, armed police and army soldiers entered and searched the home of the country manager of the U.S. NGO Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI) in an affluent neighborhood of Colombo. Under the terms of the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act, reactivated by the parliament in December 2005, security forces are permitted to enter premises and conduct searches without a warrant based on "suspicion" or an anonymous complaint. On January 10-January 12, a local Tamil employee of the U.S.-funded HALO Trust mine clearance organization was detained and tortured by unknown assailants claiming HALO employees have links with the LTTE. The Ambassador and EU Head of Mission will register our strong concern about these actions in a meeting with the Defense Secretary and Minister of Human Rights and Disaster Management on January 19. End summary.

Mine Action/Dairy Development
Staff Targeted in Warrant-less Search

12. (C) On January 11 at approximately 8 p.m., ten armed police and army officers entered and searched the home of Jeanne Samuel, the Sri Lankan Tamil country manager of the U.S. NGO the Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI). The officers did not have a warrant, and were not accompanied by a female officer, though Ms. Samuel lives alone. Under the terms of the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act, reactivated by the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) parliament in December 2005, security forces are permitted to enter premises and conduct searches without a warrant based on "suspicion" or an anonymous complaint.

13. (C) Ms. Samuel told poloffs on January 12 that the officers asked her what she was doing with an American NGO, who comes to her house, and where she had worked before. (Note: Jeanne Samuel worked previously for UNHCR on

repatriation of internally displaced persons. She has been a dinner guest of Ambassador Blake in that capacity.) Through a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, HDI will work with implementing partners the HALO Trust and Land O' Lakes to fund humanitarian mine clearance and dairy development in Jaffna in 2007. The U.S. Embassy has been involved in coordinating this project since its inception in 2005.

14. (C) Samuel also noted that when she went to register the NGO in Sri Lanka, the Registrar asked whether HDI would be willing to demine in Jaffna but move the corresponding dairy development project to the predominantly Sinhalese area of Anuradhapura. Poloff met Samuel again on January 17 to discuss an upcoming trip to Jaffna -- she said the searching of her home had not deterred her from her important humanitarian work, and that she had encountered such disapproval from elements of the GSL -- albeit not in the form of an evening visit by armed security forces -- when she worked for UNHCR.

15. (C) Ambassador Blake responded to a letter from HDI President Ralph Cberman expressing concern for this incident on January 17. Ambassador noted that the armed search of Jeanne Samuel's house was part of a wider pattern of attacks and intimidation against employees of international NGOs working in Sri Lanka and pledged to raise concern over the raid of Ms. Samuel's home with senior ministers. He praised HDI's service to Sri Lanka and offered his assistance to HDI employees at any time.

HALO Trust Employee
Abducted and Tortured

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16. (C) On January 9, U.S.-funded international mine clearance organization HALO Trust driver P. Rajendran disappeared on his way to work at approximately 7:15 a.m. HALO expatriate managers registered his disappearance with the police. On January 13, Rajendran, accompanied by his family, returned to the HALO compound with the following account:

17. (C) While bicycling to work on January 9 in full HALO uniform, Rajendran noticed two men following him on a motorcycle, one speaking on a cell phone. A white van then pulled out in front of him. Two men stepped out of the vehicle. One held a gun to Rajendran's head while the other tied and hooded him, and threw him in the van. He was driven approximately 10 minutes to an unknown destination.

18. (C) There, Rajendran was placed in a dark room, stripped and tied to a table. His assailants shaved his face and head, stabbed a broken bottle into his right foot, burned his arms, legs and chest with cigarettes and pulled out his chest hairs. (Note: HALO provided photographs of these injuries to the Embassy.) According to the internal HALO Trust report of January 13: "He was quizzed regarding HALO disposal of mines and unexploded ordinances (UXO). Rajendran replied that he was only a driver and knew nothing about explosives. His interrogators told him that other HALO employees were connected with the LTTE and that if he didn't tell the truth he would be killed. They also told him that these other HALO employees would be taken off the streets on their way to and from work as he had been."

19. (C) On January 10, Rajendran reported that he was injected with an unknown substance that rendered him temporarily paralyzed. He was left in the dark room, unclothed, and given only water to drink with intermittent interrogations until the evening of January 12. Then, he was again hooded, put into a van, driven approximately 6 minutes, and deposited near a Jaffna cinema at approximately 6:45 p.m.

10. (C) With Rajendran's permission, HALO assisted their

local employee with registering a complaint with the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), where he related these events. He asked that his case be kept low key for fear of reprisals to his family. Rajendran was the ninth local Tamil employee of the HALO Trust to disappear or be killed in Jaffna since April 2006, according to HALO's expatriate staff.

Dutch NGO Defamed,
GSL Claims Misunderstanding

¶11. (C) Following the January 8 raid of a Tamil Tiger (LTTE) camp in the eastern district of Ampara, government and nationalist media accused Dutch NGO ZOA Refugee Care of funding a hospital within a Tiger camp (ref B). According to a January 13 ZOA press release, on January 12 the GSL "Ministry of Defense communicated to ZOA Refugee Care Netherlands that reports in the press with allegations of suspected linkages with the LTTE were based on a misunderstanding by the Army's media center."

¶12. (C) Netherlands Embassy political officer Nathalie Kroner told poloff on January 14 that on January 11, a mob fronted by members of the Buddhist-monk led nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) entered ZOA's Colombo office with the intention of destroying property. ZOA officials called police to no avail. The Dutch Ambassador rushed to the scene, according to Kroner and independent media reports, and managed to turn back an angry crowd which included a group of monks. On the same day, Canadian poloff noted that she saw JHU posters linking international NGO Save the Children with the LTTE.

¶13. (C) The ZOA release continued: "While appreciating the fact that the Ministry of Defense cleared ZOA's name, it causes concern that ZOA's neutral reputation has been questioned in public before an official investigation. Accusations like the ones that we have witnessed over the past few days are contributing to a climate of intimidation, which undermines the ability of humanitarian agencies in general to carry out work that is needed and requested by all communities in Sri Lanka. ZOA also regrets the actions by

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elements of a political party that entered illegally its premises on Thursday."

Defending the Defenders

¶14. (C) Comment: We take the intimidation of humanitarian NGO staff very seriously. In December, the Ambassador held a roundtable for members of the NGO community to address their concerns. The Ambassador will raise these specific concerns with Secretary of Defense Rajapaksa and Minister of Human Rights and Disaster Management Samarasinghe on Friday. We will continue to urge the GSL to sustain regular meetings between the Ministries of Defense and Human Rights with NGOs, and make public statements of support for these organizations backed by positive action and greater access. End comment.

BLAKE